

Voter ID Bills Just Suppression in Disguise
Senator Rodney Ellis

For the second consecutive session, the Texas Legislature is tying itself in knots over an proposed solution to a problem that flat out doesn't exist. A solution which would disenfranchise thousands of legal Texas voters and likely get Texas tied up in court for suppressing the right to vote. Just like last session, organizations representing seniors, the disabled, African American and Hispanic Texans have

I'm talking about measures to require Texans to show picture identification in order to exercise their constitutional right to vote to combat so-called to

One simple fact remains: After more than two years, 20 hours of testimony and debate, a House Interim Committee study and a \$1.5 million Office of Attorney General investigation, supporters of these measures have yet to come up with one single case of the "voter fraud" they seek to stop. Not one.

The sad truth is that this issue is less about the integrity of our vote and more about blatant partisan politics. It is part of a nationwide effort. That nationwide effort, incidentally, is now the focus of several federal investigations and has led the former head of the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, Joseph Rich, to

These measures are solutions in search of a problem. In Texas, and across the country, advocates of these voter suppression bills have failed to find any evidence

We've heard time and again the horror stories of dead voters casting the deciding vote; we've heard the term "voter fraud" thrown around. Supporters of these efforts cannot provide one single instance in which people in Texas have voted using false identification. Not one. In House side with hours of testimony, yet not one documented case of fraud. This is a solution searching desperately for a problem.

Can the supporters of this bill give us evidence – any evidence, any proof – of an individual voting using false identity? Can supporters of this bill give the facts? Can they show us proof? No they can't.

I'll give you a fact: while Voter ID proponents cannot come up with a single case, we have evidence that shows these plans lead to a significant drop in turnout, particularly for African Americans and Hispanics.

Every day we see more and more evidence that so-called voter fraud is just not occurring. We know for a fact that the greatest level of fraud occurs with mail in ballots, not at the polls yet here we are again focusing on a solution past history and current courts tell us is just a new poll tax to suppress the vote.

(Austin)//At a press conference today, Senator Rodney Ellis (D-Houston) announced that he has 11 signatures to block Senate debate of the so-called "Voter I.D." legislation under consideration by the Texas House. Senator Ellis was joined by representatives of Common Cause, The People

for the American Way, Advocacy Incorporated, the League of Women's Voters and the American Civil Liberties Union in calling for defeat of this divisive measure.

"Like last session, I have the votes to defeat plans to enact voter intimidation laws," said Senator Ellis. "We've seen this movie before, and we know how it ends. It's time to drop this dangerous and divisive plan and concentrate on reforms that will actually improve our electoral system."

During the 79th Legislative Session, Senator Ellis and Senator Leticia Van de Putte (D-San Antonio) led efforts to defeat the voter intimidation bill, which would have made it more difficult for elderly, low-income and minority Texans from voting. Last session, SB 89 would have established some of the most restrictive voting laws in the nation. The legislation, opposed by groups ranging from AARP to MALDEF to the NAACP and LULAC, would have required that a voter show a voter registration card and picture identification or two forms on non-picture identification in order to vote. If a voter could not meet these requirements, the voter would be allowed to vote provisionally or the voter would have to go home to retrieve the necessary ID and come back to cast a regular ballot. Voters who didn't have the required ID with them and cast provisional ballots would have to go the courthouse to show photo ID within 5 days after the election, or their vote would not count.

The attempt to weaken voting rights is now a national movement. Twenty five states have either enacted or attempted to pass legislation that would require photo ID to be eligible to vote despite no documented evidence that a voter has voted in any state using false identification.

In late 2005, the *Washington Post* reported that career attorneys in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division recommended that the federal government reject the state of Georgia's plan to require voters to provide photo identification, but were overridden by political appointees within the department. According to the report, career officials found that the Georgia Voter ID plan would weaken African Americans right to vote. Last month, a U.S. District Court judge blocked implementation of the Georgia Voter ID plan, comparing the law to the poll tax.

"There is overwhelming evidence that the voter ID plan is a solution in search of a problem," said Ellis. "Supporters of this effort continue to throw charges, anecdotal evidence and rhetoric around, but cannot point to one single case of voter impersonation. Those of us opposed, however can cite case after case of voter intimidation and suppression. The same concerns we raised here in Texas were echoed by career justice department officials."

Voter I.D. proposals would create tremendous barriers for Texans to vote. Studies have shown as many as 21 million -- 11 percent -- do not have a photo ID. These Americans are predominantly elderly, low-income and/or minority. In Georgia, for instance, 33 percent of seniors over 75 do not have a valid driver's license. In addition, with the passage of the *Real ID Act* in Congress, it will become more difficult to obtain an official state ID.

In addition, a study of the 2004 presidential election showed that states which passed voter I.D. laws experienced an turnout reduction of 3 percent overall, and a steeper drop among Hispanics and African Americans. According to the study, prepared by scholars at Rutgers and Ohio State Universities for the Federal Election Assistance Commission, African Americans were 5.7 percent less likely to vote and Hispanics were 10 percent less likely to vote in states which passed stringent identification laws.

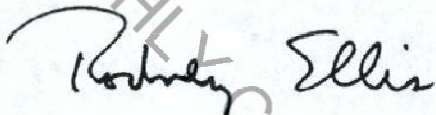
"We will not allow this blatant voter intimidation plan to become the law in Texas," Ellis said. "We've come to far and fought too hard to go back."

Dear Friend,

I wanted to provide you a quick update on what's happening with redistricting, voter ID, and some other important issues I have been working on in Austin and here in Houston.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rodney Ellis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rodney" and last name "Ellis" clearly distinguishable.

Rodney Ellis

Redistricting (Almost) Solved

A San Antonio federal court handling litigation regarding Texas' recent redistricting finally released the interim maps that will govern the upcoming congressional and legislative elections. [Click here](#) to view the new maps to see in which districts you live.

The court also announced that the primary will be held on May 29. There is still a chance, however slight, that the date could move again. The interim maps adopted by the San Antonio court have to get cleared under the Voting Rights Act by the U.S. Department of Justice. Further, a dissatisfied party to the redistricting litigation could appeal and ask the U.S. Supreme Court to review the maps and the San Antonio court's explanation for how they were drawn.

I believe the maps should have gone much further in reflecting the astounding minority population growth that Texas has experienced over the past decade, both in Houston and the remainder of the state. In the last decade, 89 percent of both Texas' and Harris County population growth has been due to minority growth, yet the interim maps fail to fully account for this growth. Only one new real congressional minority opportunity district was created under the interim plan, despite the fact that nearly all Texas' growth is due to minority -- predominantly Hispanic -- growth. And that was in North Texas, not Harris County.

It's even worse in state legislative races. Nearly 90 percent of Texas growth is due to growing minority population, yet we gained no new seats in House and Senate. Texas is now 54.1 percent minority -- and growing -- yet only one-third of Texas legislative seats are minority opportunity districts. The math doesn't add up.

It's important that you tell your friends and family about the new May 29 primary date. My concern is that an odd date that has been in flux for so long will decrease turnout in our communities. I promise to do my part to keep you informed of any future changes.